



**ABOUT FRESH HOPE**  
**What We Are**

[www.freshhope.us](http://www.freshhope.us)

- The mission of Fresh Hope for Mental Health is to empower individuals to live a full and rich faith-filled life in spite of a mental health diagnosis.
- The vision of Fresh Hope for Mental Health is to equip and empower individuals (and their loved ones) who are affected by a mental health diagnosis to live a full, rich and purpose-filled life in wellness and wholeness (mental, physical and spiritual) through participation in local Fresh Hope groups which are Christ-centered peer support groups, as well as online forums, educational opportunities and faith based mental health resources.
- Fresh Hope is a peer-to-peer Christ-centered wellness approach to mental health recovery based upon six tenets that empowers people to connect both their faith and recovery principles. This approach both empowers and encouraging individuals live full and rich lives in spite of their diagnosis.

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## **About Fresh Hope**

# The History

The Fresh Hope movement began in 2009 as a Christian support group for those who suffer from mental illness and their loved ones. Pastor Brad Hoefs felt called to start a faith-based support group. For two years, he searched with no success for materials that would help him start and lead such a group from a Biblical, hope-filled point of view.

With encouragement and input from his doctor, Dr. Michael Egger, Pastor Brad decided to write the materials himself. He developed six faith-based, Biblical tenets (principles) for those who have mental health issues and their loved ones. These tenets were key for him, having been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder in 1995. The tenets were instrumental to Brad's recovery, and now have been proven to be instrumental to others in offering hope and key insights from a Christian perspective into a wellness-driven, successful recovery journey. In 2021, a seventh principle was added to complement this life-changing recovery guide for those facing a mental health challenge and their loved ones.

Within the first eight months of starting, the group had grown significantly. Feedback from those attending was that Fresh Hope was the type of group they had been searching for but had never found. (As is true with most secular mental health groups, those attending frequently have little or no hope. They are trying to simply figure out how to cope with their circumstances, leading mostly to discussions about medicines and “coping” skills, which can easily leave one feeling even more depressed and hopeless about their recovery than they were previously).

During those inaugural months subsequent to starting Fresh Hope, one of the largest healthcare providers in the Omaha area, Alegant Health Systems, joined together with Fresh Hope. They began to provide their consumers with information about Fresh Hope. From this support, more Fresh Hope groups were born. Fresh Hope was organized as a 501(c)(3) non-profit and received several grants to help start other groups based on the initial model. Several groups began in the Omaha metro, which continue today.

Not only did Fresh Hope receive inquiries about starting groups locally, but they also received many national inquiries. Others were finding Fresh Hope through online searches – looking for the same materials Brad had been searching for before writing the Fresh Hope materials.

With this need providing the impetus, the volunteer Fresh Hope staff wrote and prepared a facilitator's manual and videoed one of their three-hour local training sessions for those who were not located near Omaha. Within a short time, several groups outside of the Omaha area and outside of Nebraska had started.

The interest from churches in starting Fresh Hope groups has been and continues to be, significant. To date, all of our research still shows that there are no other resources quite like this. There are numerous resources from a secular viewpoint, including workbooks and books on overcoming depression and bipolar issues, but these resources are not faith-based.

Continued research has resulted in our finding no one offering a workbook for a successful recovery from a faith-based perspective that offers tenets (principles) to work through to achieve success in mental health recovery. Neither have we found any materials and training, along with ongoing support, which equip someone for starting a faith-based support group for mental health issues. We say this after investing years of searching. If there is something like this written from a Christian perspective, we have not found it.

Because of the need for materials that hold to the fidelity of the Fresh Hope principles, Brad self-published a book entitled, "Fresh Hope: Living Well despite a Mental Health Diagnosis." Within the book is not only his story of tragedy to triumph but very concrete examples of how he applied these tenets to his own recovery and 28 years of pastoral counseling to hundreds.

Even more important than his story contained in the book, is the fact that it is truly a workbook. Hence, the subtitle, "A Wellness Workbook for Fresh Hope." The initial plan was to offer the book to Fresh Hope group participants to empower them to work through the tenets and equip them to live out a successful recovery.

But Brad realized while writing the book that it might also be useful for someone who has never been to a Fresh Hope group, and in addition, would help loved ones in their understanding of the issues of recovery. It could also serve as a resource for pastors and counselors to offer to those coming to them for help. Since the book was released in March of 2013 through Xulon Press, we have observed a growing interest in starting Fresh Hope groups.

With the death of Rick Warren's son, we saw a heightened awareness of the need to help those who suffer from mental illness and their families, and an increased need to better equip pastors and churches in how they might minister to them.

Because of this, more churches and individuals have been contacting Fresh Hope to see if they, too, might receive direction and materials to help them start a group. The need is great. Every day that resources such as the Fresh Hope materials are not easily available and publicized, too many people are dying from mental illness at their own hands or due to addictions that have come about because they have been self-medicating their illness and/or moods.

As the author privately wished prior to the book's release, it is now confirmed that Fresh Hope is far more than a resource manual for a support group. We now have a proven record of significantly helping with the journey to recovery. Those who attend Fresh Hope group meetings report a growing sense of hope for their future based upon the principles and understanding that hope is, in fact, a faith decision. They also report that their attitudes and view of their lives are improving. While this is not a scientific study, those who participate and work the principles report fewer, if any, hospital stays.

We believe that the need is huge within the Christian Church. Why? For many years, the agreed-upon statistic in healthcare has been that every fourth person in America suffers from some type of mental health issue.



New statistics determined by John M. Grohol, PSYD (“Mental Health Statistics”, World of Psychology, <https://psychcentral.com/>, May 3, 2010) now place that number at nearly one in three.

While these statistics are a national average, one would assume the same ratio within the Christian Church. Yet the Church at large offers very little in the way of help for those with mental health issues. Many pastors make referrals to counselors when someone comes to them for help. Some churches do allow outside support groups such as DBSA and NAMI to use their facilities, but these are secular groups with no particular emphasis on faith in Christ (i.e., AA speaks of a ‘higher power’).

Fresh Hope has a proven track record of offering a faith-based, hope-filled approach to wellness that is Biblical and practical.

Fresh Hope is a wellness approach to recovery versus a “coping approach”, which many times inadvertently comes about as a result of utilizing only the medical model. We have found nothing like Fresh Hope that offers a workbook for individual use, while also providing the training and materials for starting and leading a Christian support group for mental health issues.

The Fresh Hope book can be a significant resource for pastors and Christian counselors to read for their own understanding of the issues surrounding mental health diagnosis and recovery.

Plus, the book itself will be a resource that they will want to provide to those who come to them for help. The book is also helpful to the loved ones of those who have a mental health diagnosis.

Fresh Hope as an organization stands ready to help those who start groups, providing coaching assistance by certified facilitators, and offering continuing support.

In closing, it is important to acknowledge a grassroots movement within the mental health field today that is emphasizing the importance of peer-to-peer support for a successful recovery from mental illness. It is widely recognized that peer support helps those who have a diagnosis to transition from medical care into taking back their lives and seeing themselves as much more than their diagnosis. This is even more reason for the Church-at-large to seriously consider offering Fresh Hope in their local setting.

# The reality of mental illness

One out of every five children, teens, and adults in America has a diagnosable mental illness in any given year. And the lives of those who love them are also affected by their mental health challenge. This means that a mental health challenge touches approximately 50% of the American population.

And while the doctor, therapist, and medicine are necessary, they are not enough. Suicide rates continue to rise. The medical (the doctor, therapist, and medicine) aspects of mental health recovery can lead to a type of “learned helplessness.”

When someone’s life is interrupted by mental illness, it can be tough to see a practical way forward with day-to-day life, and a good future seems out of reach. Feelings of hopelessness begin to settle in. This hopelessness can lead to suicidal thinking and even death by suicide.

A serious gap exists between someone receiving medical treatment for mental illness and them learning how to live well in spite of it. This gap is critical. So, we become the bridge, the guide from the point of diagnosis to living well.

Research shows that finding a way to live a hope-filled life can be best caught, not taught, by peers who have “been there” and are now living well. Research also shows that the best antidote for hopelessness is hope that is rooted in faith.

We provide those who are hopeless a safe place to process their pain and experience faith-filled hope modeled, shared, and given in support groups, classes, coaching, and resources that are led and written by peers who are living well despite their mental health challenges. This serves as a bridge between someone’s diagnosis and living well despite their diagnosis.

Our approach is based on seven mental health recovery principles and 25 years of clinical research on hope. And it works!

Because of Fresh Hope, thousands of people are living active, faith and hope-filled lives. They are enjoying their relationships, their families, their work, and are feeling more hopeful than ever before!

They are living well in spite of their mental health challenge! They are thriving!

# What We Believe

When hopeless people have a safe place to process their pain, and faith-filled hope is modeled and shared, they become hope-filled and thrive (in spite of their mental health challenge).

## Our Mission

A mental illness seems to rob you of your future hopes and dreams. And hopelessness begins to take over.

The doctor, the therapist, and medicine are not enough to learn how to live life despite having a mental health challenge.

And those with lived experience (peers) can model and empower one another.

As peers, we believe there is hope, and it is possible to live well because we have been there.

We guide and support those with a mental illness, along with their loved ones, to find hope that is based on research so that they and their loved ones can have hope and dreams again, and live a faith-filled, full, and vibrant life.

# Fresh Hope Vision

The goals of Fresh Hope are:

- To equip and empower individuals (and their loved ones) who are affected by a mental health diagnosis to live a full, rich and purpose-filled life in wellness and wholeness (mental, physical and spiritual) through participation in local Fresh Hope groups which are Christ-centered peer support groups, as well as online forums, educational opportunities and faith based mental health resources.
- To provide ongoing assistance to individuals and their families during times of transition, by providing Mental Health Navigators in local communities who are Certified Peer Support Specialists and Certified Wellness Coaches.
- To challenge the Christian church to address the mental health crisis in their community- challenging them to provide a “compassionate, understanding, safe and supportive-place” for those who struggle with mental health issues. This includes understanding that many mental health challenges are due to the brain’s improper function and are not character flaws, moral failures or a spiritual weakness.

- To advocate on both the state and national levels for continued mental health reforms to repair the issues that “broken” in the system.
- To provide peer-run wellness centers in the local communities as a positive place of encouragement, connection, empowerment and learning.
- To join with other organizations and voices in tearing down the thick walls of cultural stigma regarding “mental illness.”

# Fresh Hope Philosophy

Fresh Hope is a peer-to-peer Christ-centered wellness approach to mental health recovery based upon six tenets that empower people to connect both their faith and recovery principles. This approach both empowers and encourages individuals live full and rich lives despite their diagnosis.

The Fresh Hope approach includes the following biases:

- Peer-to-peer support plays a very significant role in one's successful recovery.
- There is a difference between "just coping" and thriving.
- When used exclusively, the medical model can lead to a "learned helplessness".
- Recovery and wellness are a "taking back" of one's life and living it to the fullest possible.
- Peers who give back by coming alongside others in recovery sometimes receive even more than they "give."
- People who have "been there" oftentimes understand and help more people than those who have not been "through it."



- Faith in Christ is foundational to having hope in hopeless situations.
- The Christian church needs to be proactive and reach out with hope to the millions who are in emotional pain.
- The state and federal mental health systems cannot do “it all”. There are many things they could improve upon.
- One must accept personal responsibility for his/her own recovery and wellness.
- Sometimes you have to simply “push-through” even though you feel horrible or feel like giving up.
- It’s self-destructive to use your mental health diagnosis as an excuse for not moving forward in recovery.
- Medicine is necessary. Being overmedicated is not.
- Hope not only involves faith, but a plan of how to get to the place you want to be in life based upon your gifts and abilities.
- At times, peers need to challenge one another to move forward in recovery (and many times only peers can do this).
- One needs true accountability to save people who will hold them accountable for their thinking and behavior.



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